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Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

Report of the Secretary-General

Introduction

1. The Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, convened in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2000/230 of 26 July 2000, was held at the Conference Centre of the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany in Berlin from 27 August to 5 September 2002. The Conference was attended by 282 representatives and observers from 88 countries,[1] 2 specialized agencies,[2] 1 intergovernmental organization[3] and 4 international scientific organizations.[4]

2. The provisional agenda of the Conference had been prepared by the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (New York, January 1997). The Conference considered the reports of Governments and linguistic/geographical divisions on the situation in their countries and regions and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Seventh Conference. It established three technical committees to deal with a range of specific issues pertinent to national standardization of geographical names, toponymic databases, terminology, romanization systems, and toponymic education and practice, as defined by an agenda item of the Conference.

3. The Conference adopted 16 resolutions and a vote of thanks. The resolutions reflected the concerns on issues regarding the standardization of geographical names expressed in plenary sessions and in the three technical committees of the Conference. The proceedings of the Conference will be published in one volume, containing the report of the Conference and the resolutions adopted. The technical papers submitted to the Conference were distributed to the participants, and most of them, as well as the report of the Conference, will be published through the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) web site, developed and maintained by United Nations Statistics Division.

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I. Findings of the Conference

4. The Conference reviewed the status of the resolutions of the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and acknowledged the establishment of the recently created web site of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. The Conference recognized the importance of continuing the development of national programmes on standardization of geographical names, of creating toponymic data files, geographical names gazetteers and databases, and of harnessing information obtainable from the increasing number of toponymic web sites. In addition, the Conference reviewed developments on romanization systems, training courses in toponymy, and cooperation with national and international agencies and bodies. The Conference, encouraged by these achievements, stressed the need to continue national standardization, and toponymic education and practice, as well as the development of romanization systems.

5. Country reports were presented to plenary sessions of the Conference: 55 were filed in written form[5] and 2 were verbal reports.[6] Major trends, according to the reports, have included: (a) the increased number of national names authorities established since the last Conference; (b) the ongoing review of principal policies, procedures, and organizational and institutional issues relating to standardization of geographical names; and (c) the achievements that extend beyond traditional gazetteers and atlases to include digital gazetteers, geographic information system (GIS)-based databases, and web sites.

6. The Conference, through the work of Committee I on national programmes, presented and discussed aspects of national standardization in different countries, including field collection and office treatment of names, treatment of names in multilingual areas, the administrative structure of national names authorities and toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors. The Conference recommended that Governments expand their existing data-collection procedures for geographical names and establish procedures for collecting names from all acceptable sources in order to better answer the needs of geographical names users (resolution 10). The Conference also discussed the work on exonyms and, noting that in several countries there had been a tendency to increase the number of exonyms, adopted some measures that would help in the reduction of the use of exonyms (resolution 4). The Conference noted the significance of geographical names in the preservation of the cultures of minority and indigenous groups and the active work being undertaken in recording, recognizing and promoting such toponyms. It recommended that a world summary of such activities be prepared (resolution 1). Having recognized the potential difficulties and lack of general direction in respect of naming a geographical feature in order to commemorate a living or recently deceased person, the Conference recommended that national guidelines address this issue (resolution 2).

7. The Conference, through the work of Committee II on technical programmes, acknowledged the progress made during the past four years towards the creation of toponymic data files, gazetteers and web sites. The benefits and challenges of distributing data through the increasing number of toponymic web sites were discussed. In addition, the Conference reviewed cooperation with national and international agencies and bodies, noting the liaisons established with International Organization for Standardization Technical Committee 211 (ISO/TC 211) and the

Unicode Consortium and emphasized the need to promote toponymic data exchange formats and standards (resolution 7). The Conference recommended the continued organization of joint meetings of the linguistic/geographical divisions and the working groups of UNGEGN to address substantively regional needs in the areas of toponymic training, data files and gazetteers, romanization systems, publicity and funding, and terminology (resolution 5).

8. International programmes and exchanges were issues covered by the work of Committee III. The Committee discussed aspects of those issues relevant to pronunciation of geographical names, terminology, geographical features common to two or more nations, romanization systems, country names, toponymic education and practice, and international cooperation. The Conference recognized the importance of reflecting the correct pronunciation of a geographical name and recommended that guides on this be developed, particularly for a digital environment. In addition, the establishment of a working group of UNGEGN was recommended inasmuch as it could be beneficial and of potential assistance in the overall reduction of exonyms (resolution 11). The Conference took note of the newly published *Glossary of Terms Used in the Standardization of Geographical Names* and recommended that additions and amendments continue to be reviewed (resolution 3). The Conference underlined the continuing importance of romanization systems and was pleased to endorse modifications for romanization of Thai (resolution 13) and the formal use of "Serbian Cyrillic" in documentation (resolution 14). Furthermore, the Conference recognized the ongoing need for cooperation between UNGEGN and the Terminology and Reference Section of the United Nations Secretariat with regard to names of countries (resolution 15).

9. Presentations from international scientific organizations highlighted the significant developments and advances in standardization, digital mapping and other technology associated with geo-information, in particular their involvement and contributions in support of aspects of geographical names standardization. The international standardization body, ISO/TC 211 presented its current achievements in spatial standards, aimed not at standardizing geographical names, but at providing models for gazetteers, metadata, quality descriptions, terminology etc. The report of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) highlighted two aspects of the work, namely, the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) Subcommittee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN) and the new edition of special publication S-23 entitled "Limits of Oceans and Seas". The work of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS) was detailed, including a 2001 issue of the Council's journal *Onoma* dedicated to the topic "Aspects of Names Standardization".

10. The deliberations of the three Conference Committees confirmed that the concept of geographical names as constituting part of a nation's cultural and historical heritage is gaining recognition, and encouraged member States to intensify both the systematic collection of geographical names and their dissemination to the public at large including the local usage of name forms (resolution 9). The Conference, noting the identification of standardized geographical names information as a crucial and fundamental component of the spatial data infrastructure by the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG), recommended that UNGEGN, through its working groups and divisions, actively facilitate the provision of standardized geographical names information from appropriate national authorities to UNGIWG (resolution 8). A

challenge for the geographical names community in each country is how to strengthen cooperation with cartographers and other users in order to make geographical names a component of the national spatial data infrastructure (resolution 6). Noting the need for training and publication materials, the Conference requested the assistance of the United Nations Statistics Division in this regard (resolution 15).

11. A list of the 17 resolutions adopted by the Eighth Conference and the proposed provisional agenda for the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names are attached in annexes I and II, respectively. The activities recommended by the Conference and those required for the preparation of the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, deemed to be of a continuing nature, have been included in the medium-term plan under programme 7, subprogramme 7, for the period 2002-2005, and it is anticipated that they will be incorporated into the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005. Inclusion of these activities is not expected to give rise to additional expenditures. In the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, those activities that are of a continuing nature fall under section 9 (Economic and social affairs).

II. Recommendations to the Council

12. In view of the continuing important contributions made by standardized geographical names, toponymic data files and gazetteers to the work of decision makers, cartographers, linguists, planners and the public at large, and the essential contribution that the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names were continuing to make to the work of member States in the geographical information field and related cartographic areas, the Conference recommended that the Council:

(a) Endorse its recommendation that the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names should be convened for eight working days in the second half of 2007;

(b) Also endorse its recommendation that the twenty-second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names should be convened in 2004;

(c) Request the Secretary-General to take measures, where appropriate and within available resources, to implement the other recommendations made by the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, especially with regard to the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

Notes

[1] Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Djibouti, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Lithuania, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Paraguay, Peru,

Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yugoslavia, Zambia, Holy See.

[2] International Maritime Organization, World Bank.

[3] Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH).

[4] International Cartographic Association (ICA), International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), International Organization for Standardization (ISO), Names Society of Southern Africa.

[5] Submitted by: Algeria, Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Madagascar, Malaysia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Yugoslavia.

[6] Presented by: Myanmar, Sudan.

Annex I

List of resolutions adopted by the Eighth Conference

1. Promotion of minority group and indigenous geographical names
2. Commemorative naming practices for geographical features
3. United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) Working Group on Terminology
4. United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) Working Group on Exonyms
5. Joint meetings: United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) linguistic/geographical divisions and working groups
6. Integration of geographical names data into national and regional spatial data infrastructures
7. Toponymic data exchange formats and standards
8. Assistance to the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG)
9. Geographical names as cultural heritage
10. Toponymic data-collection procedures
11. Working group on the pronunciation of geographical names
12. Standardization of names of countries
13. Romanization of Thai geographical names
14. Romanization of Serbian Cyrillic
15. Support for training and publications
16. Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the twenty-second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
17. Vote of thanks

Annex II

Provisional agenda for the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

1. Opening of the Conference.
2. Election of the President of the Conference.
3. Organizational matters:
   (a) Adoption of the rules of procedure;
   (b) Adoption of the agenda;
   (c) Election of officers other than the President;
   (d) Organization of work;
   (e) Credentials of representatives to the Conference.
4. Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Eighth Conference.
5. Reports by divisions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on the situation in their division and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Eighth Conference.
6. Meetings and conferences:
   (a) United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names;
   (b) Divisional and interdivisional meetings and programmes;
   (c) National names meetings, conferences and symposiums;
   (d) International names meetings, conferences and symposiums.
7. Measures taken and proposed to implement United Nations resolutions on the standardization of geographical names.
8. Economic and social benefits of the national and international standardization of geographical names.
9. National standardization:
   (a) Field collection of names;
   (b) Office treatment of names;
   (c) Treatment of names in multilingual areas;
   (d) Administrative structure of national names authorities;
   (e) Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors.
10. Exonyms.
11. Reports on programmes to assist with the pronunciation of names.

12. Toponymic data files:
    (a) Data-collection procedures;
    (b) Data elements required;
    (c) Toponymic data transfer standards and formats;
    (d) Automated data-processing (ADP) systems;
    (e) Compatibility and structure of systems;
    (f) National gazetteers;
    (g) Other publications.
13. Toponymic web sites.
14. Terminology in the standardization of geographical names.
15. Features beyond a single sovereignty:
    (a) Policies, procedures and cooperative arrangements;
    (b) Features common to two or more nations.
16. Writing systems:
    (a) Romanization;
    (b) Conversion into non-Roman writing systems;
    (c) Writing of names in unwritten languages.
17. Toponymic education and practice and international cooperation:
    (a) Existing education and practice;
    (b) Training courses in toponymy;
    (c) Exchange of advice and information;
    (d) Exchange of personnel;
    (e) Technical assistance;
    (f) Cooperation with national organizations;
    (g) Cooperation with international organizations;
    (h) Cooperation with public information media.
18. Country names.
19. Arrangements for the Tenth Conference.
20. Adoption of resolutions drafted during the Conference.
21. Adoption of the report of the Conference.
22. Closing of the Conference.